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GROUNDS AND METHODS
 OF ADMISSION
 TO SEALING ORDINANCES.

REV. D. D. BANNERMAN, M.A.

**GROUNDS AND METHODS
 OF
 ADMISSION TO SEALING ORDINANCES;
 OR,
 WHO SHOULD BE RECEIVED TO THE LORD'S TABLE?
 WHOSE CHILDREN SHOULD BE BAPTISED?
 HOW SHOULD WE RECEIVE YOUNG COMMUNICANTS?**

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P R E F A C E.

THE Paper, which forms the first two chapters of this little work, was written at the request of the Programme Committee appointed by the First General Council of the Presbyterian Alliance. It was read in part at the Council at Philadelphia in September, 1880, and appears in the volume of their proceedings. It is now published separately with a few slight alterations, and with an additional chapter on "Methods of Admission to the Lord's Table for the first time." The origin of the book will explain one or two allusions which I have not thought it needful to remove. The fact of its having been prepared in part for a Council of the Reformed Churches may also serve as an apology for its bearing somewhat more of an academic and ecclesiastical cast than it might otherwise have had.

D. D. B.

CONTENTS.

CHAPTER I.

	PAGE
WHO SHOULD BE RECEIVED TO THE LORD'S TABLE? . . .	1

The Church, in its ideal, a pure Communion ; but this not realised on earth—How should this state of things be regarded?—Two extremes—(1.) Lax discipline or none—Stoddard's theory—Independent theory—Plymouthism, "Join the purest"—Distinction between duty of office-bearers and of applicant—True grounds of admission—What meant by "credible profession"—President Edwards and Dr. Hodge.

Scripture evidence on subject—(1.) Our Lord's teaching ; (2.) Practice of apostles ; (3.) Teaching of epistles.

Practical advantages of position advocated.

CHAPTER II.

WHOSE CHILDREN SHOULD BE BAPTISED?	40
--	----

(1.) How far general agreement—Cases of orphans, heathen children, slaves—(2.) May children be baptised whose parents are baptised, but not in full communion?—Highlands of Scotland—Continental Churches—"Half-way covenant" in New England.

CHAPTER III.

METHODS OF ADMISSION TO THE LORD'S TABLE FOR THE FIRST TIME,	48
--	----

Christian instruction of the young and ignorant in Reformation times—Return in this to spirit and methods of early

Church—Luther's "Little Catechism"—Calvin's—The three great Protestant catechisms—Catechising with the Reformers only a means to an end—"The school of Christ"—How best to receive the catechumens to full communion with the Church.

Confirmation: corruption and abuses of it in Roman Catholic Church—In what sense opposed, and in what approved by Reformers—Testimony of Dr. Hodge—Calvin's position on subject.

Confirmation in Church of England—In Continental Churches—"Bishopping" in Scotland—Want of guidance on part of Church—Methods devised and used by individual ministers—Davidson of Prestonpans in 16th century; Donaldson of Dalgetie in 17th century; Willison of Dundee in 18th century.

Methods of dealing with "young communicants," and of admission to the Lord's Table in Free Church of Scotland; in United Presbyterian Church; in Established Church.

Form for "public reception into full communion of those baptised in infancy" in Reformed Dutch Church in America (Presbyterian)—"Order of confirmation" in Reformed Episcopal Church in America.

GROUND S AND METHODS OF ADMISSION TO SEALING ORDINANCES.

CHAPTER I.

WHO SHOULD BE RECEIVED TO THE LORD'S TABLE ?

"The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ ? For we, being many, are one bread, and one body : for we are all partakers of that one bread."

"But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread and drink of that cup."

"If any man that is called a brother be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner ; with such an one no not to eat. . . . Do not ye judge them that are within ? But them that are without God judgeth."—1 Cor. x. 16 ; xi. 28 ; v. 11-13.

THE two meanings in which I shall chiefly use the word " Church " in this chapter are those regarding which there is general agreement in Reformed Christendom.

1. The " Church " means in Scripture the whole company of the elect—"all who have been, are, or shall be gathered into one under Christ the Head."¹ "*Ecclesia universalis*,"

¹ Conf. c. xxv. 1.

says Luther, quoting with emphatic approval words of John Huss, which had been condemned by the Church of Rome, "*est prædestinatorum universitas.*"¹

This "General Assembly and Church of the first-born, which are written in heaven," all agree to call the "Church invisible," in this sense at least that, although all its members are seen and known of God, it is impossible that they should now be gathered into one place, or that each should be seen and known certainly by the eye of man.

2. The word Church in Scripture means a society or fellowship in any place of professed believers, or "visible saints"—to use the old-fashioned phrase—meeting together statedly for worship, and *visible* in their associated capacity to the eyes of men.² It is not needful for our present purpose to inquire whether this society is to be confined to the single congregation worshipping together, or whether, as Presbyterians believe, there is Scripture warrant for saying that the principle of representation may come in, and the unity and responsibilities of the Church visible be carried further. Nor need we refer now to that doctrine of the catholic visible

¹ Köstlin, *Luther's Lehre von der Kirche*. Stuttg. 1853, p. 9.

² Owen, *Works* (Goold's ed.) xv. 252 f. 262, 320 f. Banner-man, *The Church of Christ*, i. 11 f. 15.

Church, the kingdom of Christ on earth, which holds so marked a place in the Westminster standards, and in the thoughts of the great ecclesiastical divines of the seventeenth century.¹

We have no occasion in this chapter to go beyond the two senses of the word now indicated, using it to denote, *first*, the whole company of those who are Christ's; and *secondly*—what all admit to be the *unit* at least, of the Church as manifested on earth—the worshipping congregation, gathered in the name of Christ, and joined together on the basis of some common relation to him. What kind of relation, and *how* to be tested, is what we shall have to consider presently.

The Church, therefore, is essentially a fellowship—a *communion*. It consists of those “called out”—as the name *ἐκκλησία* suggests—from the promiscuous multitude, and *gathered together* for common ends. And in the first and highest sense the Church is essentially, and from its very nature as defined, a “pure communion.”

Setting aside for the present such cases as that of the infant children of believers, and keeping to that of members in complete standing, the true Church as existing on earth is the fellowship of true believers with their Lord and with each other, and of such *only*. “All saints who are

¹ Walker, *Theology and Theologians of Scotland*. Edin. 1872. Lect. iv., “Doctrine of the Visible Church.”

united to Jesus Christ, their Head, by His Spirit and by faith, have fellowship with Him in His graces, sufferings, resurrection, and glory. And being united to one another in love, they have communion in each other's gifts and graces."¹ If any man is not a true believer, he is not of that fellowship. "If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ," he is under the anathema² of that "holy catholic Church, which is invisible."

"The Church," said Melancthon, in that Defence of the great Reformation Confession of Augsburg, which became itself a standard in the German Church, "the Church is primarily—before all else—the society of those who have faith and the Holy Spirit in their hearts."³ "Es weiss, Gottlob, ein Kind von sieben Jahren," Luther puts it in his emphatic way, "was die Kirche sei, nämlich die heiligen Gläubigen, und die Schäflein, die ihres Hirten Stimm hören."⁴ All Reformed Christendom holds that the Church, in its ideal and in its true constituency—"ecclesia quæ re vera est coram Deo" (Calvin)—is and must be a pure communion.

¹ Conf. c. xxvi. 1.

² 1 Cor. xvi. 22.

³ Apol. Conf., Aug. iv. So in the early editions of his "*Loci*:" "Ecclesia proprie et principaliter significat congregationem iustorum, qui vere credunt Christo et sanctificantur Spiritu Christi." Cf. Jul. Müller, *Dogmatische Abhandlungen*. Bremen, 1870, pp. 297. Krauss, *Protestantische Dogma von der unsichtbaren Kirche*. Gotha, 1876, pp. 34-42.

⁴ Art. Schmalk, cf. Calvin, *Inst.*, lib. iv. c. 1, 3, 7.

But then it is as universally admitted that, in point of fact, that is not realised on earth. Whenever you pass from "saints united to Christ by His Spirit and faith," to "saints by profession," from the very nature of the case, an element of uncertainty comes in, do what you will to avoid it. It is owned on all hands that, as there was a traitor among the twelve, as there were an Ananias and Sapphira in the Pentecostal Church, so there may be, and generally are, men and women not real believers in every worshipping congregation in this world, and that the solemn ordinance of the Lord's Supper, "the communion"—which, from its very nature and name, ought to be the sign and embodiment of the truest fellowship—is actually partaken of by not a few who have no part or lot in the matter of salvation.

Further, it is almost as generally allowed that this involves serious guilt on the part of members or office-bearers, or both.

Well, our present subject calls us to consider : In what light are we to look upon this state of things, and how ought it practically to be dealt with? If the Church on earth *ought* to be a "pure communion," a fellowship of true believers only, by what means is that to be brought about or aimed at? Or, translating these questions into the ecclesiastical language of the Pro-

gramme : What are the Scriptural grounds and methods of admission to *sealing ordinances* ?

What that last phrase means I need not pause to explain in this Council. "Sacraments," as the Westminster Confession expresses it, "are holy signs and *seals* of the covenant of grace, immediately instituted by God, to represent Christ and His benefits, and to confirm our interest in Him ; as also to put a visible difference between those that belong unto the Church and the rest of the world, and solemnly to engage them to the service of God in Christ according to His word"—c. xxvii. 1. And *both* the sacraments of the New Testament are rightly included by the Programme Committee in the designation of the subject, because the question of qualifications for membership in the visible Church is equally raised by both. Except as regards the relative order of the two ordinances—a point which, though it greatly disturbs our Baptist brethren,¹ happily creates no practical

¹ Comp. on the one side And. Fuller, "On Terms of Communion," *Works*. Lond. 1837, vol. v. pp. 288-311 ; and on the other Robert Hall, "On Terms of Communion," *Works*. Lond. 1831, vol. ii. The question discussed is not, as might be supposed from the heading, that of the qualifications for Church membership generally, but simply that which divides the "strict communion Baptists" from those of that denomination who advocate "free" or "mixed" communion, the former party excluding from the Lord's table all Christians not baptised by immersion at full age, and the latter admitting Christians baptised in infancy.

difficulty for us—to ask what is needful in an applicant for adult Baptism is the same thing as to ask what is needful in an applicant for admission to the Lord's Table.

With reference to Baptism as dispensed to infants, the general admission among competent theologians that adult Baptism forms the normal instance of the administration of this sacrament,¹ makes it suitable to treat the case of infants separately, and in the light of principles reached in discussing the general question. Many difficult and delicate practical points will thus be best approached.

On what principles, then, ought sealing ordinances to be administered? What is the mind of Christ, the Head, for His Church, office-bearers, and members in this thing? For it is clear that two classes of questions naturally arise, questions for the Church or its representatives who admit in its name, and questions for the person seeking admission to the communion of the Church. We may ask—1st, What sort of persons are the office-bearers justified, before God, in receiving to Baptism or the Lord's Table? Or, 2nd, What sort of persons are *themselves* justified before God in coming forward? The two questions are quite distinct: Was it right in Philip

¹ Cunningham, *Works*. Edin. 1863, ii. 125 f. Bannerman, *Church of Christ*, ii. 108 f.

the Evangelist to admit Simon, the Samaritan soothsayer to the communion of the Church? and—Was it right in Simon himself to make the profession in connection with which he was admitted.¹

The subject is an important one, both from a theoretical and a practical point of view, as all must feel who have studied it, and the wide literature connected with it. It leads into many difficult and complicated questions in both spheres, which call for a clear understanding and a firm grasp of the principles of God's Word bearing upon them, and no little Christian wisdom and faithfulness in applying those principles.

Two things are obvious almost at a glance in reading the words of our Lord and His apostles regarding Church membership. (1.) There ought to be discipline in the Church, a certain exercise of authority for the admission or exclusion of members, as indeed, no society requiring common action for common ends can possibly subsist in an orderly way without it; and (2.) There may be an excess of it. It may be exercised, even from praiseworthy motives, on wrong principles, and by incompetent hands, and the result be evil in the Lord's eyes.

For example, in Matt. xviii. 15, our Lord tells us how an offending "brother," a fellow-disciple,

¹ Acts viii. 5-24.

is to be dealt with about his trespass, ending with "but if he neglect to hear the Church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican." And on the other hand, in an earlier chapter of the same Gospel (xiii. 24-30, 36-43), "the kingdom of heaven," the Church as manifested in this world, is likened to a field in which the owner sowed good seed, but an enemy mingled tares; these representing respectively, as our Lord expounds it, "the children of the kingdom" and "the children of the wicked one." And when the servants appeal to the householder: "Wilt thou then that we go and gather them up?" his answer is, "Nay, lest while ye gather up the tares, ye root up also the wheat with them. Let both grow together until the harvest;" clearly showing this, at least, that mistaken zeal for the purity of the Church's membership might be ready to use means for that right end which were not right, which would do more harm than good, and were against the will of the Church's Head.

In point of fact, two extremes in this matter have been manifest in the history of the Church.

I. There have been, and there are, communities, nominally Christian, in which the greatest laxity and corruption of manners have widely prevailed, without any remedy being sought for, or any general wish for it being

apparent. And there are other Churches, with many signs of spiritual life, and very many most excellent and consistent Christians in their ministry and membership, where at the same time, alongside of the former, we see many others whose lives are palpably of an opposite kind; and the door of communion is practically open to *any* who desire, from whatever motive, to enter, and no attempt is made by the Church—and perhaps, from its constitution and circumstances, no attempt is practicable—to exercise upon those within its pale that “godly discipline of the primitive Church,” the absence of which the Church of England deplores every year in the preface to the Communion Service.

Everything which *exists* generally finds some one, in virtue of that fact, to produce reasons for its existence, and for its right to continue to be. But apart from that tendency—which is far from being without its advantages—principles which would open the Lord’s Table to men not even professing to be Christians have been defended by some truly good and able men, who were not embarrassed in this matter by their ecclesiastical position, and who were of a thoroughly Evangelical spirit.

It may not, *e.g.*, be so well known to all members from the other side of the Atlantic as it doubtless is here, that about the beginning of

last century a theory of this kind was propounded by Mr. Stoddard, the grandfather of President Edwards, and himself an eminent and pious man. He taught that "unconverted people, as such, had a right in the sight of God to the Lord's Supper;" that "those who really rejected Christ, and disliked the Gospel way of salvation, and knew this to be true of themselves," might and should come to the sacrament, and be admitted by the Church, on the ground that it is a converting ordinance, and that they desire to get a blessing from it. Through Mr. Stoddard's influence these views were widely adopted by the ministers and people of New England; and in 1750 Jonathan Edwards himself was actually deprived of his charge at Northampton for opposing this theory and urging greater purity of communion.¹ I must not pause now to point out how this theory of Stoddard's was a natural reaction from the previous theory and practice of Independent churches in New England, but may just say in passing, that as few evils in this world are without some compensating benefit, so the deplorable injustice by which Edwards was ejected from his ministry at Northampton had two good results: it gave us his great treatise on "Qualifications for Communion in the Visible

¹ *Works*. Lond. 1834, I. p. clvii. ff. Hodge, *Syst. Theol.* iii. 563-570.

Christian Church," and it helped at least to make him a Presbyterian.¹

II. But the other extreme—that represented by the servants in the parable—has been more generally attractive to men of a devout and earnest spirit; and it is easy to see why it should have been so. It is a true and lofty thought that the Church of Christ in its ideal is essentially a *pure* communion of those "washed and sanctified and justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God." It is true that the hypocrite and the unbeliever have no right to join themselves, even in name, to its fellowship on earth, and that all lawful and Scriptural means should be used to bring this home to the conscience of all such persons. "Do we," a Scottish divine wrote nearly 230 years ago, "in opposing your doctrine concerning the necessary qualifications of Church members in relation to external Church fellowship, oppose a thing because it is such as it ought to be? Nay, we but oppose you who make the door of the visible Church straiter than ever the Lord made

¹ "As to the Presbyterian form of Church government," he wrote in July, 1750, to Dr. John Erskine, of Edinburgh: "I have long been perfectly out of conceit of our unsettled, independent, confused way of Church government in this land; and the Presbyterian way has ever appeared to me most agreeable to the Word of God, and the reason and nature of things." *Works, ut supra*, p. clxiii.

it, and so in effect disclaim the way allowed by God Himself for ordering His Church as not wise enough, nor accurate enough. Or do we set ourselves against a Church, such as you describe, consisting of all truly godly, so far as men can judge? God forbid, and far be it from us. Were there such a Church in the world, it would be very dear and precious in our estimation, and we should bless the Lord for the riches and power of His grace bestowed upon them. We wish from our souls that our Churches, and all the Churches in the world, were of such a complexion and constitution. And we acknowledge that, as it is the duty of every professor in the visible Church in the sight of God that they be, not only 'so far as men can judge,' but in truth and in deed, truly gracious, having true saving faith, repentance, and sanctification; so that it is the duty of ministers, and of every one in the Church, according to their station and capacity, to endeavour, by all means instituted by God, that it may be so."¹

It is most fit and right that Christian men and women should be deeply grieved at every instance in which one called a brother or sister in the Lord has manifestly yielded to unholy impulses, and

¹ Wood, *Examination of Mr. Lockyer's Lecture at Edinburgh*, (1651) *Concerning the Matter of the Visible Church*. Edinburgh, 1654, 103; cf. Müller *ut supra*, 386 f.

has brought reproach on the name of Christ and of Christian in such a way that even the "love that hopeth all things" must doubt, or more than doubt, whether the root of the matter were ever found in them.

Unhappy instances of this kind may multiply in the experience of a Christian man; they may seem to thrust themselves in his way, until he is greatly saddened and disheartened. Then, perhaps, he turns to others, in whose lives there are no positive offences of that sort; but he sees them eager and absorbed in worldly things, with little apparent warmth or interest in the things of God; and he says within himself, hastily, but not unnaturally: "These, too, are sensual, having not the Spirit." Thus he comes to feel as if he could not trust those with whom he is joined in outward fellowship for sympathy in the spiritual matters which he has most at heart. He looks round him in the congregation on a communion Sabbath, and sees one and another there whose presence seems to him to make it not a *pure* fellowship in which the Lord's presence and blessing might be confidently and joyfully expected.

It is an easy step from this point to the conclusion: "There is something far wrong in this state of things. Some different principle ought to be applied to *secure* that none but the truly converted and spiritually minded shall enter the

Church as members, or sit at the Lord's Table. Should not the Church, or its representatives, lay it on their conscience to receive none to communion unless they are fully persuaded, on sufficient evidence, that *this* man is born again, and is a new creature in Christ Jesus?" This is what is generally known as the Independent theory of admission to sealing ordinances.¹

And then a further question will arise for some minds: If the Church is essentially a pure communion, does not impurity in its membership, which might have been prevented, destroy the essence of a Church, and turn away all Divine blessing from its ordinances? And ought we not to separate from any professedly Christian society which does not appear to us a pure communion in this sense; and, if absolute purity cannot be attained on earth, at least "join the purest"? Has the old warning no application here? "Come out of her, my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues;" "Come out from among them and be ye separate, saith the Lord; and touch not the unclean thing, and I will receive you and be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty."

¹ It is held by Independents under various forms, which need not be referred to here. The *practice* of very many Independent churches is substantially identical with our own.

Many of us are familiar with such reasonings and their results, in the case of the Plymouth Brethren.

Now, such a line of thought and feeling has undoubtedly much about it which ought to awaken genuine sympathy and respect.¹ I am convinced that the want of such sympathy and respect has greatly impaired the effectiveness of many a pamphlet against Plymouthism. If we wish rightly to meet error in doctrine or practice, the first thing needful is clearly to recognise to what truth or side of truth it allies itself in earnest minds, and what true spiritual instincts are seeking satisfaction in this way.

Plymouthism, with its errors and its unhappy results, can be best met on the one hand by the true Scriptural doctrine concerning the Church, and on the other by the practical manifestation of that spirit of mutual help and fellowship which ought to characterise all the members of the Church. It may be well for each of us to consider how far we, in our Church relationship, may have been lacking in that inward grace of brotherly love from which there would naturally spring those words and deeds of frank and kindly Christian intercourse and friendship for which

¹ Compare Bersier's interesting account of how he was led from the school of Vinet in this matter to the position which he now holds.—*L'Eglise*. Paris, 1877, pp. 6, f. 8-16.

many are half consciously craving, and the support of which some temperaments peculiarly miss.

Such thoughts and feelings as have led some to Plymouthism naturally arise in the minds of earnest men and women, perhaps recently brought under the power of the truth, who have learned to shrink strongly from sin and to cherish fervent desires after holiness and the fellowship of the holy, but have not been accustomed, it may be, to think out their thoughts clearly for themselves, nor to recognise the importance of grasping the *whole* teaching of Scripture on any subject instead of simply one part or aspect of it. At the same time it is obvious that the practical conclusion to which such a theory of "pure communion" points, and the attitude towards others which it almost necessitates, have much about them which is likely to ally itself to human infirmities as well as to Christian instincts. "Pure communion," in the Plymouthistic sense, appeals not only to the zeal of a young convert, but to his natural self-confidence, his proneness to sweeping criticism and hasty inferences from half-seen truths, his tendency to plume himself on being now superior in insight and attainment to those to whom he had hitherto looked up.

The main and decisive question regarding qualifications for Church membership is, of course, "What saith the Scripture?" But, be-

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fore proceeding to that, two considerations may be noted, which are of the nature of presumptive evidence against the theory of pure communion to which reference has been made.

(1st), It manifestly reduces the possibility of Church fellowship to a minimum. "Join the *purest*," plainly means "Join the *smallest*." If the essence of a Church is destroyed, or at least its purity fatally tainted, by the presence of an unworthy member in its fellowship, one about whom there may reasonably be suspicions—as has been often asserted from the days of Tertullian and the Novatians¹ onwards—then there is less danger of that with a hundred members than with five hundred, with twenty than with a hundred, with ten than with twenty. Nay, of whom can a man be so sure as of himself, and perhaps one or two of his own family, whose spirits for years he has had more opportunity of trying than in the case of any beyond that circle? Once lay such responsibility for purity of communion upon a scrupulous conscience, and experience has amply shown what a future of constant divisions is before you, ending not unfrequently in absolute and literal individualism in religion.²

¹ Gieseler, *Eccles. Hist.* (Eng. Trans.) Edin. 1846, i. 284; Neander, *Church Hist.* (Torry's Transl.) i. 330 ff. iii. 270, 34.

² According to this theory, as Wood points out to Lockyer,

For (2nd) the testimony of history on the subject is very clear and unmistakable. The views about pure communion now referred to were far too obvious not to occur soon. Wherever Christianity ceased to be persecuted; wherever men saw in any country that it was the winning cause, and social and other advantages were connected with it, there it speedily became manifest that some had found their way into the Church who were not of it. The same difficulties and feelings of distress arose in pious minds, and the same method of escape naturally suggested itself. The method has been tried, in fact, over and over again at intervals—sometimes pretty wide ones—for the last 1600 years—now by those calling themselves the pure ones (*οἱ καθαροί*) in the third century; now by the Donatists in the fourth and fifth; now by various of the smaller sects in Germany and Holland in the sixteenth century, and again by the “Seekers” and others under the English Commonwealth in the seventeenth. And it has always wrought out its own refutation. The theory with its attendant practice, more or less strict, lived for a generation or two, was examined and rejected by the ripest Christian judgment of

“likely there never was in the world a true visible Christian Church, unless it was that of the eleven after that Judas hanged himself, nor ever shall be.”—P. 84.

the Church of the time, and then gradually died out, disappearing so completely that when, a century or two afterwards, from the old causes, it sprang up again, it had generally been quite forgotten, and so came with the power of novelty to run the same cycle and end as before. Its reappearance is not by any means among the worst signs of an age. Through the natural operation of human infirmities, it has often been associated with seasons of revival for which, as a whole, the Church had reason to give hearty thanks. It has emerged again in an aggressive form in our own time. But nothing has been said in support of it by Darby, Macintosh, Davis, or Kelly, so far as I have seen, which had not been said before in substance, and often almost in the same words, by those, *e.g.*, with whom Augustine contended in the fifth century, and those whom Richard Baxter in England, and Wood, of St. Andrews, in Scotland, had to oppose upon this topic in their day.¹

Every age, of course, must fight its own battle, but it may do so with better heart as it comes

¹ J. N. Darby, "What is the Church?" Lond. 1870. "The Doom of Christendom." "What is the Church as it was in the Beginning, and what is its Present State?" "What the Christian has amid the ruin of the Church," &c. C. H. Macintosh, "The Assembly of God." Davis, "Help for Inquirers;" "Scriptural Inquiry as to what is the Church." W. Kelly, "Lectures on the Church of God."

to know that it is really an old adversary whom it is meeting in a new garb, but no stronger than when he was defeated on the same ground long ago. And no age and no Christian man, in facing any serious question of doctrine or practice, has any right to neglect the deliberate decisions of the highest sanctified judgment of the Church upon the same question in former generations. The promise of "the Spirit of truth to guide into all the truth" was not given for us and our generation alone, but has been fulfilled all along the way by which God has led His Church on earth. And it is well for us, therefore, to remember that once and again, and yet again, the verdict of history has been given upon this theory of "pure communion," and has declared that, however plausible in some of its aspects, it is radically unsound and practically unworkable.

The question then is, what is the true and safe ground between the two unscriptural extremes of lax discipline and neglect of the grave responsibilities which do lie upon the Church in this matter on the one hand, and on the other of using means with a view to purity of communion which are unwarranted and incompetent? In answering this question, it is of the first importance to keep clearly before us a distinction made at the outset. It serves, if rightly understood and applied, to clear up not a little confusion of

thought upon this subject, to prevent many consciences from being burdened with painful responsibilities which they are not called to take upon them, and by assuming which they are brought into a wholly morbid state. And it tends to put the responsibility effectively upon those to whom it really belongs. I mean the distinction between the ground of admission to sealing ordinances "in foro ecclesiæ" and "in foro Dei," to use the old formula. In other words, what according to Scripture will fully justify *the Church, or its office-bearers*, in admitting a man is one thing; what according to Scripture will justify the *man himself* in the sight of God in asking admission is another and quite a different thing.

As to the *first*, I believe that what Scripture requires is a serious and intelligent profession of faith in Christ and obedience to Him, with a corresponding conduct; as to the *second*, the *real existence* in the man of what he professes—a true faith and sincere obedience. The Church is responsible only for what concerns the first-named qualification; the man himself, and he only, for what concerns the second. That is to say, the gates of the kingdom of Christ on earth should be open to every one coming with a credible profession of what is needful for entrance into the kingdom of Christ in heaven.¹

¹ By "*credible*" profession there is implied no judgment,

This is, in substance, the answer given by the Reformed Church generally by the lips of all her leading theologians who have discussed this subject.¹ In all essential points it is just the answer of President Edwards in his masterly treatise on "Qualifications for Communion."

It seems to me that the lamented Dr. Charles Hodge—I speak with the greatest reverence for his memory—has been hardly fair to Edwards in the statement of his position given in the "Systematic Theology" (iii. 569 ff.). "According to this theory," Dr. Hodge says, "the Church consists of those who are 'judged' to be regenerate. None but those thus declared to be true believers

whether of charity or otherwise, on the part of the minister or elders admitting the applicant, as to his real spiritual state, but simply a judgment as to certain facts, namely, as explained above, that the man makes this profession in an apparently serious spirit, that he has knowledge enough to understand what he is doing, and that there is nothing in his known conduct to give the lie to what he now says and does. Cf. Durham, *Treatise concerning Scandal*. Edin. 1659, 88 ff. Wood, *ut supra*, 29 f. 152 f.

¹ So, e.g., Prof. Wood, of St. Andrews, in his singularly clear and able reply to Lockyer, the first champion of the Independent theory of church-membership upon Scottish ground. The latter, who was Provost of Eton under Cromwell, and a man of some eminence in his day, had given his lecture—published at Leith, in 1652—the ambitious name of "A Little Stone out of the Mountain." Hence, the quaint first title of Wood's reply: "A Little Stone, pretended to be out the Mountain, tried and found to be a Counterfeit." Cf. Apollonii, *Consideratio*, &c. cap. 1, "De qualificatione membrorum ecclesiæ." Lond. 1644.

are to be received as members of the Church." Now, I admit that Edwards gives some ground for such a representation by a certain ambiguity in one clause of his thesis: "That none ought to be admitted as members of the visible Church of Christ in complete standing but such as are in profession, *and in the eye of the Church's Christian judgment*, godly or gracious persons."¹ But this ambiguity is removed if we have due regard to the explanation of the statement which he himself gives. What the Church "judges" is *not*, according to him, that the applicant is regenerate, but simply that he makes a serious and intelligent profession of faith and obedience, and that his outward conduct is agreeable thereto; this, as he expressly says, whatever the *private* suspicions or fears of the minister, or any other, about him may be.²

Edwards' position, in fact, is thoroughly Presbyterian in substance, although with a tinge of the old Independent phraseology, very natural in a New England man. An additional proof of this may be found in his willingness to subscribe the Westminster Confession,³ including, of course, its well-known definition of the visible Church as

¹ *Works*. Lond. 1834, i, 434.

² *Ibid.* 435, 452, 475.

³ Expressed to Dr. Erskine in the letter already referred to, *Works*, i. clxiii.

consisting of all those who *profess* the true religion, together with their children.

With respect to the Scripture evidence for this view of the true grounds of admission to sealing ordinances, it is impossible to do more than indicate it in the most general way. It is derived from many quarters, and is of many kinds, direct and indirect. Strong arguments in behalf of the position now laid down may be drawn from general principles and considerations connected with the Scripture doctrine of the Church, its nature, and design. It is supported—as Edwards and others have conclusively shown—by the basis on which God placed His Church in the Old Testament dispensation, and by what is told us of the principles of the Baptist's ministry. But let us pass at once to the teaching of our Lord and the precepts and practice of His apostles on this subject. We must refer to a few passages only, and barely indicate the kind of proof which they afford.

1st, As to our Lord's teaching.

I need not say here how unmistakably and emphatically He required a *real* spiritual change in all who would be His disciples indeed, and have place in His true and spiritual Church—“Except a man be born again he cannot see the kingdom of God. . . . Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit he cannot enter into the

kingdom of God." "Except ye be converted and become as little children ye shall not enter into the kingdom of God." "Not every one that saith unto Me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of My Father which is in heaven."¹

Nor is it necessary for our present purpose to refer to passages as to dealing with a brother who has trespassed, as to the keys of the kingdom of heaven, &c., which prove that discipline is to be exercised in the visible fellowship of believers on earth. The question before us is rather as to the *limits* of discipline—the point at which, with respect to the applicant for communion or the member claiming full privileges, the responsibility of the Church or its office-bearers ceases, although that of the man himself remains.

Now I need not prove, for it is admitted on all sides, that the Saviour in His teaching both states and takes for granted that, in point of fact, there will be always more or fewer unworthy members in the visible Church on earth. That, of course, does not settle the point, Who are to blame for their presence there, themselves or others? But it may be helpful to some minds to remember that this fact which so troubles them was clearly before the mind of the Head

¹ John iii. 3 ff.; Matt. vii. 21; xviii. 3.

of the Church from the first. Sad though it be in itself, it did not take *Him* by surprise, nor does it defeat His purpose of blessing for His Church and by it. "When once the Master of the house is risen up and hath shut to the door," He told His disciples, "many" should "stand without and knock," and plead in vain: "We have eaten and drunk in Thy presence, and Thou hast taught in our streets;" but He shall say, "I know you not, whence ye are. Depart from Me, all ye workers of iniquity."¹

Nay, that very experience, painful as it must be to every spiritually-minded man, of close outward connection in solemn acts of worship with one of whom there is much reason to fear that he has no real interest in the things of God, was part of the daily life of the Saviour upon earth. And with Him it was no mere dread or suspicion. While He sometimes apparently spoke of *all* the apostles, on the ground of their profession, as if all were true disciples ("Ye that have followed Me, ye also shall sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel"), at other times He showed that He knew well and felt painfully that there was a traitor even in the inmost circle of the infant Church: "Ye are clean; but not all;" "Have not I chosen you twelve, and one of you is a devil?"

¹ Luke xiii. 25-30.

But I must not dwell on this. I would draw attention for a moment or two to that remarkable series of parables regarding the Church or kingdom of heaven as manifested on earth—those parables in which we see the wheat and the tares together in the field; the draw-net, enclosing fishes good and bad; the guests at the king's supper, worthy and unworthy; the wise and foolish virgins together in the house, alike in name and outward preparation and avowed purpose. Now, in the teaching of those parables, three things stand out clearly as to the fellowship of the Church on earth: (1.) That there is an actual mingling in it now of the worthy and the unworthy, and that it is not by the hands of men, but of angels or the Lord of angels, that the final separation is to be made: "*They* shall gather out of His kingdom all the stumbling-blocks" (πάντα τὰ σκάνδαλα) "and them which do iniquity;" "He shall thoroughly purge His floor, and gather His wheat into the garner."¹ (2.) That the Church or its office-bearers are implicitly or expressly forbidden to do, in the way of separation, what they may be disposed to think they *might*, and what possibly, to a certain extent, they *could* do. And (3.) That the reason for this prohibition is that there are some kinds of separation for which their hands

¹ Matt. xiii. 41; iii. 12.

are incompetent, their eyes not sufficiently keen or sure, and in trying to effect which they would be certain to do harm, although seeking to do good.

Thus, *e.g.*, in Matt. xiii. 24 ff., the servants *saw*, as they believed, the tares. Should they not therefore go and gather them up? "But he said, Nay; lest *while* ye gather up the tares" —they might *succeed* in removing some of these —"ye root up also the wheat with them." There could hardly be a more direct reply, by anticipation, to the arguments of those who urge that the Church on earth should be constituted upon the principle of admitting and retaining none but the regenerate, and that the office-bearers are bound to be persuaded in their own judgment that a man is truly converted before receiving or retaining him as a member in their fellowship.

The only possible escape from the plain teaching of this parable is to assert that the argument proves too much; that according to this view there should be no discipline in the Church at all. But to make such an assertion is simply to evince ignorance of the first principles of sound and sober interpretation of Scripture. It is an axiom, admitted by all who are competent to judge in the matter, that no parable was ever meant to teach *all* truth. Each one is designed

to bring out, in a vivid and impressive way, some special truth or aspect of truth, which again was meant to be supplemented by other parables or passages of the Word. The duty of Church discipline, of caring in a suitable way for purity of communion, rests upon its own full evidence. Here, and in other like passages, we learn an important *companion* truth, namely, the danger of measures to which we might be prompted by a mistaken zeal for the honour of the Master. As Augustine said in reply to Donatist advocates of pure communion: "We ought to obey our Lord in the Gospel, *both* when He tells us that he who will not hear the Church should be to us as an heathen man and a publican, and when He forbids us to gather out the tares, lest in so doing we root up the wheat also; for *both* precepts may well be kept." ¹

2nd, The practice of the apostles shows how they understood the principles laid down by our Lord when, both before and after His resurrection, He "gave commandments to the apostles whom He had chosen, speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God." ²

We see in the Apostolic Church a vigorous and faithful discipline, as, *e.g.*, in the case of Simon

¹ Comp. Wood, *ut supra*, 163-6. Trench, *On the Parables*, 86 f. Müller, 312 f.

² Acts i. 2 f.

Magus, but no test for admission beyond a profession, on the part of the applicant, of faith in Christ, and a purpose to follow Him. So with the 3000 on the day of Pentecost, and with the 5000 shortly after. So with the admissions under Philip at Samaria. No blame whatever seems imputed to the evangelist for receiving the soothsayer into the Church too hastily. On the contrary, we find him immediately afterwards honoured to receive the Ethiopian treasurer on a still shorter probation and on precisely the same principles. So with Cornelius at Cæsarea, with the converts at Philippi, and many others.

The difficulty which is apt to strike one in connection with these cases is, in fact, not as to the strictness, but the apparent ease with which applicants were admitted. It might not be quite plain at first sight how, when professing converts were so quickly received to communion, there could be sufficient evidence that their profession was a serious and intelligent one. When we consider, however, on the one hand, the peculiar circumstances of the time, that to profess Christianity meant then to be ready to suffer or even to die for it; and, on the other hand, the simplicity and power of the apostles' preaching, we shall see that there really was a reasonable guarantee that the applicant understood sufficiently what he was

doing, and was in earnest in the profession he made. But certainly there was no time for such lengthened examination and probation as could warrant the office-bearers of the Church in saying of such as the Samaritan soothsayer, that he, in their deliberate judgment, was a regenerate man, and admitting him on that ground.

3rd; And so also in the Apostolic Epistles.

These are addressed to those "called saints," "brethren in the Lord," to "the Church of God which is at Corinth," "to them that are sanctified in Christ Jesus," "to them that have obtained like precious faith with us," &c. And yet, at the same time, it appears from the same Epistles that there are some in those Churches of whom the apostle "stands in doubt, lest he has bestowed upon them labour in vain;" others "who have sinned already and not repented," who have given way to gross disorders and heresies; and some retained in communion, whom he has to enjoin the Church at once to put out of their fellowship.¹ The fitting remedy for such a state of things, where the evil has gone the length of "scandal," *i.e.*, open sin, or serious error in doctrine, is pointed out—*viz.*, the faithful exercise of discipline; "we command you, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that

¹ 1 Cor. v. 1 ff.; xi. 21; xv. 12; 2 Cor. xii. 20 f.; Gal. iv. 11; v. 4.

ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly, and not after the instruction which he received from us." "A man that is an heretic, after the first and second admonition, reject." "Them that sin, rebuke before all, that others also may fear."¹ But no change is indicated as to the principles of admission to membership, nor doubt implied as to their soundness.

Now, it is plain that the titles by which those apostolic Churches are addressed, and the state of matters actually existing among them, are just what we should expect upon the supposition that the grounds of admission in each case had been those above stated. Their members had been received on profession of faith in Christ, and purpose to follow holiness. The Christian society or Church in each place had been constituted on the ground of that profession; and they are, therefore, addressed in terms of it. But it by no means followed that the actual spiritual condition of each of the members corresponded to the titles given to the Church as a whole. "In the superscription of letters to societies of men," as President Edwards puts it, "we are wroth to give that title or denomination which properly belongs to them as members of such a body. Thus if we should write to the Royal Society of London, or the Royal Academy of Sciences at Paris, it would

¹ 2 Thess. iii. 6; Titus iii. 10; 1 Tim. v. 20.

be proper and natural to give them the title of "Learned;" for whether every one of the members truly deserve the epithet or not, yet the title is agreeable to their *profession*, and what is known to be aimed at and professedly insisted on in the admission of members. . . . So it seems to be the manner of the apostles in their epistles to Christian Churches to address them under titles which imply a profession and visibility of true holiness." "Not any pretended skill of the pastor's in discerning the heart, but *the person's own serious profession* concerning what he finds in his own soul, after he has been well instructed, must regulate the public conduct with respect to him, where there is no other external visible thing to contradict and overrule it. And a serious profession of godliness, under these circumstances, carries in it a *visibility* to the eye of the Church's rational and Christian judgment."¹

I have thus briefly indicated some of the Scripture evidences for what I believe to be the true ground of admission to sealing ordinances in the Church. The position advocated further commends itself by its great practical advantages, as all who have sought to act upon it know.

To admit any one to communion on the principle of saying or implying that he was a converted person, in my judgment, is what I

¹ *Works*, i. 456, 475.

should be very sorry to do, both for my own sake and for his, unless shut up to it by the plainest teaching of Scripture, and that, as we have seen, leads to a very different conclusion.

1. For my own sake.

All ministers and elders, who hold the views on this subject which I support, must feel that they have responsibility enough in doing their own part towards applicants for admission, in dealing tenderly yet faithfully with them, in avoiding what might flutter and perplex the young and ignorant, in putting the truth clearly and simply, in showing them about what a man is to examine himself, in using all suitable means to bring them to a right spirit in dealing with the great question of their own salvation—in dealing with Christ, the Lord, for themselves. We should altogether refuse to be, or to *seem*, responsible in any way—save as regards faithfulness in such preliminary steps—for their answer, for the conclusion that it is right for them to make a public profession of faith in Christ, and obedience to Him.

We may have our own impressions on the point. Of some we may stand in doubt, as they come forward; upon others we may look with hope and confidence; over others, again, we may have great joy of heart. It may be the duty of a minister to advise a man to *wait*, while it may

not be his duty to refuse him access to communion, if he persists in his desire, and takes the full responsibility of his action.

But it is the greatest relief to every true minister of Christ to feel that what he is called to make the ground of his admission of applicants, is not a judgment even of charity as to their spiritual state—of which God alone can rightly judge—but a judgment of *facts*, which we are competent, with due care and faithfulness, to judge upon, namely, that the applicant has knowledge enough to understand what he is doing, and that his profession is seriously made, with nothing in his outward life, so far as known to us, to bring discredit upon it.¹

2. For the sake of the applicant himself.

I should be most unwilling, as a minister, to take any other position than that now explained. We avoid thereby not a few obvious dangers. Difficulties enough remain within the sphere left to the pastor in this matter,² and mistakes may still be made. A young minister, especially, is apt to expect that all experiences of conversion and the Christian life are to be cast in one

¹ Bannerman, *Church of Christ*, i. 79 f. Candlish, *The Christian Sacraments*, 106 f.

² The well-known answer to the question in the Larger Catechism: "May one who doubteth of his being in Christ, or of his due preparation, come to the Lord's Supper?" is admirable in spirit, but difficult of practical application in particular cases.

mould. But the limitation of his responsibility makes it less likely that weak but sincere believers will be rejected, and the wheat thus rooted up in the attempt to get rid of all the tares. "Were this," says Wood, "made an universal rule of admission into Church fellowship, namely, a declaration of the experimental work in their heart, that they may be judged regenerate, verily, many an honest, gracious soul would never obtain such a judgment upon them while they live; there being many such who, put them to declarations of this kind, could say little or nothing. . . . Nay, it were in effect to erect a stage for hypocrites to out themselves upon, and to cast a stumbling-block in the way of honest hearts not indued with the gift of expressing themselves."¹

Certainly, by the position laid down we reduce, to a great extent, the temptation to insincere profession of experiences, which the applicant knows will be expected, which a hypocrite will make readily, and which one not wishing to be so may be pushed into by pressure of circumstances.²

¹ Wood, *ut supra*, 147.

² "This accurate and pretended cleanly way of these Brethren," says Wood, in words which might seem written with an eye to more recent developments of the theory of pure communion, "though it tend to exclude many who may be truly regenerate, yet may let in any unregenerate, if they can but play the hypocrite handsomely, and have some book-learned knowledge."—163.

Again, if the minister or the elder's judgment of the applicant being a converted person is the warrant for his admission, he will be very apt to rest in that afterwards; the more so, it may be, the more elaborate the process by which the minister satisfies himself.

Where the pastor takes the attitude already indicated, he is far more likely to reach the great end of arousing conscience, and of making the man or woman with whom he is dealing feel how solemn a thing it is to covenant with Christ, and how the duty and responsibility of it lie upon himself or herself alone. To have that individual responsibility earnestly and affectionately laid upon the conscience by a true minister of Christ is the most awakening experience through which the applicant can pass. He is made to realise that, while of such things as knowledge and outward conduct man may judge, as to the true qualifications in the sight of God, He that judgeth him is the Lord. When it comes to the turning-point of the whole matter, Is it right for *him* to call himself a disciple of Christ, to profess faith and obedience? he is sent alone into the presence of the King to find his answer there in secret on his knees. The profession involved in his coming to the table of communion is thus emphatically *his own* profession of the hope that is in him as to his personal relation to Christ;

and he makes it as such before the Lord and before His people.

Instances will no doubt rise to the memories of many pastors here, in which young people were in this way aroused to a sense of spiritual need, and led to seek and find a Saviour, and whose after-life proved the reality of the change which they then underwent, but who came to them quite ready to assent vaguely to any form of profession which the minister might put into their lips, and who would have said "Yes" to any leading questions asked.

CHAPTER II.

WHOSE CHILDREN OUGHT TO BE ADMITTED TO BAPTISM.

“Suffer the little children to come unto Me, and forbid them not ; for of such is the kingdom of God.”—MARK x. 15.

“For the promise is unto you and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call.”
—ACTS ii. 39.

“Else were your children unclean ; but now are they holy.”—
1 COR. vii. 14.

“Lovest thou Me ? . . . Feed My lambs.”—JOHN xxi. 15.

THIS, as Dr. Hodge truly says, is “a very delicate, difficult, and important question.” I can offer but a few notes, indicative chiefly of the kind of problems that arise in connection with it, and of the lines in which a solution has been sought.

I. All Presbyterians agree that the infants of members of the visible Church in full standing ought to be baptised. There is, further, very general agreement that infants should be baptised who are in such a position that members of the Church can rightly stand to them so far “*in loco parentum*,” can become responsible for their

Christian education, and are willing so to do. This latter head includes such cases as those of orphans, children adopted in Christian families or by Christian missions at home or abroad. The question of the Baptism of heathen children was before the Synod of Dort. A few years after Hoornbeek, a leading theologian of the Dutch Church, discussed a number of points of this kind in a letter to John Durie.¹ The rule of the Church of Scotland in such cases is given, as follows, by Steuart of Pardovan: "In case of children exposed, whose Baptism after inquiry cannot be known, the session is to order the presenting of the child to Baptism, and the session itself is to see to the Christian education of the child. As also when scandalous persons (*i.e.*, those out of communion for gross offences) cannot prevail with any fit person, or rather relation, to present the child in their name, or when the relations of deceased parents refuse to become their sponsors, then the session is to order as is said."²

Some interesting extracts are given by Dr. Hodge from the decisions of the Assembly of the American Presbyterian Church regarding the

¹ *Epistola ad celeberrim virum, Joh. Duræum. Lugdun Batav.* 1680, 313-56.

² *Collections.* Edin. 1709, 124; comp. Act IV. of Assembly, 1712.

Baptism of apprentices, "children of parents in servitude," and heathen children.¹

But II. May those infants be baptised who are not in such plainly exceptional circumstances, who are children of parents themselves baptised and not under discipline, but not members in full standing?

How, *e.g.*, are ministers in the Highlands of Scotland to deal with parents outwardly consistent in life, and most regular in Church attendance, who will on no account make the profession implied in coming to the Lord's Table? How are our brethren in the Protestant Churches of France, Italy, and Spain to deal with men who have discarded all faith in the doctrines of the Church of Rome, in which they were baptised, who are desirous that their children should receive Baptism from Protestant pastors and be brought up under Christian influences, although they are not prepared to make or imply any positive profession of faith themselves? Are we to refuse to such men any recognised standing in the visible Church for themselves or their children?

It is obvious that the more strict the rules regarding admission to the Lord's Table, the more pressing in a practical point of view such questions become. It is natural, therefore, to find them

¹ *Syst. Theol.* Lond. and Edin. 1873, iii. 561 f. Moore, *Presbyt. Digest.* Philadelphia, 1873, 664 f.

emerging at an early date among the Independent Churches of New England. About the same time, or somewhat earlier, they were fully discussed in Holland. We may note three of the answers then given to the question: May the children of parents baptised, but not in full communion, be received to Baptism?

1. Yes; on the ground of the parents' Baptism. The parents are members of the visible Church, although not in full communion. Their standing as such was recognised by their Baptism, and has not been forfeited so long as they are not actually cut off from it in the exercise of discipline. They have, indeed, failed to improve their privileges as they ought, and are not yet qualified for admission to the Lord's Table; but this failure in duty on their part must not be visited upon their children by denying them Baptism.¹

2. Yes; because Baptism is but the *initial* sacrament. A higher standard of attainment and profession is needful for admission to the Lord's Supper than in the case of one seeking Baptism for himself, or at all events, for his children. This view was advocated in Holland in the seventeenth century. It was the theory popularly known in New England about the same period as the Half-way Covenant. It was decided in a Synod at

¹ Hoornbeek, *ut supra*, 315 f. Comp. Bersier, *L'Eglise*, 14 f. Hodge, *The Church and its Polity*. Edin. 1879. 215 f.

Boston, where the question was fully discussed, that "such baptised persons as, without being prepared to come to the Lord's Supper, were of blameless character, and would own for themselves their baptismal obligations, ought to be allowed to present their children for Baptism."

The propositions on which this conclusion was based are given by Dr. Hodge, who adds that this decision "came to be approved by the general practice of the Congregational Churches of New England. Such also," he goes on, "it is believed, although on somewhat different principles, was the general practice of the Presbyterian Church in this country until within a comparatively recent period of its history."¹

Dr. Hodge himself appears to incline to this position. He quotes with approbation Dr. Cotton Mather's defence of it. "Those," he says himself, "who, having been themselves baptised, and still professing their faith in the true religion, having competent knowledge, and being free from scandal, should not only be permitted, but urged and enjoined to present their children for baptism, that they may belong to the Church, and be brought up under its watch and care. To be unbaptised is a grievous injury and reproach, which no parent can innocently entail upon his children. The neglect of baptism, which implies a want of

¹ *Syst. Theol.* iii. 567 ff. 572.

appreciation of the ordinance, is one of the crying sins of this generation.”¹ On the other hand, Dr. Hodge clearly states that “the requirements for participation in both sacraments are the same. . . . Those, under the Christian dispensation, entitled to baptism are entitled to the Lord’s Supper. Those who, unbaptised, would be entitled to baptism for themselves, are entitled, and *they only*, to present their children for baptism. Baptism and the Lord’s Supper are not converting ordinances. They are to be administered only to those who profess to be Christians.”²

In the Highlands of Scotland, while the theory of Church membership is that of the Westminster Standards, the practice is to a considerable extent akin to that of New England under the “Half-way Covenant.” Many truly earnest and consistent Christians hold back there from participation in the Lord’s Supper, while receiving Baptism for their children. No doubt with respect to them the position of the pastor may often be: “These are *virtually* communicants. I should have no hesitation in admitting them to full communion did they apply for it, although from special scruples and distrust of themselves they shrink from doing so.”³

¹ P. 579.

² P. 574 f.

³ Comp. Schleiermacher’s conception of an outer and inner circle of “Aspirants” and Members of the Church. *Christliche Glaube*, 2nd ed. § 148. 2, § 150. Müller, *ut supra*, 356 f.

III. Yes ; because both sacraments are seals of an *external* covenant. The visible Church is based upon this covenant, and it is to the Church visible that the sacraments belong. The conditions of entrance are a profession of historical or intellectual faith in the true religion, and an outward conformity to its rules. Applicants for the sacraments, therefore, do not profess to be Christians except in an outward way. They simply declare that they are not infidels or scoffers, and that they wish Church privileges for themselves and their children.

De Marck and Gomar advocated this theory in Holland. Vitringa and others strongly opposed it. De Moor gives a full account of the controversy.

This was, in substance, the position of Stoddard, Blair, and others in America in the eighteenth century, to which reference has been already made.¹

All who have given any attention to this subject must agree with the suggestion of the Theological Faculty of Utrecht in 1648 regarding one of George Gillespie's famous CXI. Propositions, that further light was desirable on the question, "How, and how far the power of the Church has to do with (and its duty may be discharged towards) *incomplete members of the Church*, so

¹ Hodge, *ut supra*, 563, 566.

to speak; that is to say, those baptised in infancy and all other catechumens, and even hearers.”¹

¹ Hoornbeek, *ut supra*, 356.

CHAPTER III.

METHODS OF ADMISSION TO THE LORD'S TABLE FOR THE FIRST TIME.

“One shall say, I am the Lord's ; and another shall call himself by the name of Jacob ; and another shall subscribe with his hand unto the Lord, and surname himself by the name of Israel.”—ISA. xliv. 5.

O God of Bethel ! by whose hand
Thy people still are fed ;
Who through this weary pilgrimage
Hast all our fathers led :
Our vows, our prayers, we now present
Before Thy throne of grace :
God of our fathers ! be the God
Of their succeeding race.
Through each perplexing path of life
Our wandering footsteps guide ;
Give us each day our daily bread,
And raiment fit provide.

* * * * *

Such blessings from Thy gracious hand
Our humble prayers implore ;
And Thou shalt be our chosen God,
And portion evermore.

Second Paraphrase (PHILIP DODDRIDGE).

Volk des Herrn, bring dein Geschlechte
Nach dem alten Licht und Rechte

Her zum König aller Knechte ;
Sprich : Herr, hier ist dein Geschöpf !

* * * * *

Kommt, ihr Kinder, die wir haben
Als vieltheure Gottes Gaben ;
Nehmt vom Schatz, dran wir uns laben,
Den euch zugedachten Theil
Einen Theil am Liebesbände
Mit dem ewgen Vaterlande,
Aber auch am Kreuzestande,
Und am Weltverleugnungssinn.
Wollet ihr euch binden lassen ?
Jesu Kreuz mit Freuden fassen,
Und die falsche Ruhe hassen ?
Willst du, liebes Kindervolk ?

Confirmations-lied (GRAF VON ZINZENDORF).

IN nothing was the true spirit of the Reformation more plainly seen than in the care taken in all the Reformed Churches for the Christian instruction of the young and ignorant. In every country where the Reformation prevailed, three great movements went on together ; the Gospel was preached ; the Bible was given to the common people in their own tongue ; and the young and neglected were systematically trained in the knowledge of Divine truth. As the Scottish Reformers expressed it, " The youth-
heid and the pair were brought into the school of Christ."

The leaders of the Reformation went back in this respect as in others, both to New Testament teaching and to the example of a purer antiquity.

E

Much faithful work had been done in the early centuries in connection with the training of catechumens, and their reception into full communion with the Church.¹ But times were changed since the days when Chrysostom gave the people of Antioch his "First and Second Catechetical Instruction for those about to be baptised," and Augustine wrote his treatise "On Catechising the Uninstructed," at the request of a deacon of Carthage, who was himself labouring in that work, and felt discouraged by its difficulties.² It had been very different during the middle ages. For centuries the Church of Rome had shut up the Bible from the people, and had done nothing for the Christian nurture of the young. Not till Protestant catechisms had been abroad for more than a generation did Rome produce, in self defence, the ponderous Latin Catechism of Trent.

It is interesting to find that wherever, beyond the pale of Rome, evangelical life had been main-

¹ Cyril of Jerusalem, *e.g.*, is known to us as a writer almost solely from his Catechetical Lectures. Eighteen of these were delivered to candidates for Baptism, at evening services, in the Empress Helena's Basilica in Jerusalem, about the middle of the fourth century. They were followed up by five noon-day lectures, in the Anastasis, or Chapel of the Resurrection, "to those lately baptised."

² This worthy deacon, like many others of Augustine's friends and correspondents, bore what some would call a Puritan name. He was known as "Brother Deo-Gratias," or "Thank-God."

tained, or had sprung up afresh under the quickening breath of God's Word and Spirit, there earnest attention had been given to the Christian training of the young. The Waldensians in the Italian Alps, and the Bohemian brethren amid their hills and forests, had catechisms long before the Reformation.¹ The Hussites sent a Latin copy of their catechism to Luther six years before he wrote his "Kleiner Katechismus."²

But the great spring time of blessing for "the youthhead and the poor" in Europe began in the 16th century. The very foremost minds on the side of the Reformation in Germany, Switzerland, France, and Britain, gladly gave their strength to frame simple forms of Gospel teaching for the young and ignorant, couched in their own mother tongue. John Brentz, the Reformer of Würtemberg, was about the first to lead the way by publishing a Catechism in 1524 for the use of the Protestant schools which he set on foot. It is worthy of note that to this day there is probably no country in Germany where there is more of evangelical life among the people than in Würtemberg. Brentz was closely followed by Luther, whose admirable "Little Catechism" appeared in 1529. Calvin wrote a French

¹ Zezschwitz, *die Katechismen der Waldenser und Böhmischen Brüder*. Erlangen, 1863.

² Schaff, *Creeds of Christendom*. New York, 1878, i. 248.

catechism at Geneva in 1536. Re-written by him a few years later, it passed into all the languages of Europe, and did noble service, especially in France and Scotland. Out of it in great measure rose the Heidelberg or Palatine Catechism in 1563, and the Shorter Catechism of the Westminster Assembly in 1647. These two hold as undoubtedly the foremost place in the Churches of the Reformed or Calvinistic group as the "Little Catechism" does in those of the Lutheran. "These," says the historian of the Creeds of Christendom, "are the three most popular and useful catechisms that Protestantism has produced, and have still the strongest hold upon the Churches they represent. They have the twofold character of catechisms and symbolical books. They are alike Evangelical in spirit and aim; they lead directly to Christ as the one and all-sufficient Saviour, and to the Word of God as the only infallible rule of the Christian's faith and life."¹

Along with and besides these great typical catechisms, were a multitude of other formularies written in all the tongues of Europe, some of an elaborate, and some of a very simple kind, which remain to show what an amount of loving care and pains were bestowed upon this part of the

¹ Schaff, i. 247, 467-70, 533-54. Bonar, *Catechisms of the Scottish Reformation*. Lond. 1866. Preface, xxvi-xxx.

Church's work in Reformation times. But all these things were only means to a great end. What the Reformers had at heart was not merely to communicate knowledge, but that the young should be won for Christ, that they should be brought, as they came to years of understanding, to enlist themselves openly in His service, and that they should be fitted to serve Christ and their own generation according to the will of God. That was in their eyes the crown and consummation of a course of Christian training. The catechism was but a help placed by the Church in the hand of the Christian parent, teacher, or pastor, as they strove to bring the child, the youth, or maiden, "into the school of Christ," in the highest sense, into true union and fellowship with the Master Himself, and with the company of His faithful people on earth.

When, therefore, there was reason to hope that this end, through God's blessing, had been attained, the question naturally arose, How might the final step, so far as outward fellowship was concerned, best be taken? When the catechumens were prepared to profess intelligently their faith in Christ and obedience to Him, how might the Church most fitly recognise the fact, and receive them into her fellowship as members in full standing, and entitled to all Christian privileges? To express the same thing

in ecclesiastical language,—What was the best method of admission to sealing ordinances in the Church ?

Between Baptism and the sacrament of communion, the Roman Catholic Church had placed the rite of confirmation. This, by the development of the hierarchical system, had come to mean consecration by the hands of the bishop, coupled with anointing with oil and other ceremonies. It had been raised to the rank of a sacrament, and was declared to confirm and increase the grace conferred in Baptism, and to imprint a "*character indelibilis*" upon the recipient. As such it was rightly rejected by the Reformers as clearly unscriptural, opposed to the whole teaching of the Gospel as to the way of salvation and the nature of the Church. "But," as Dr. Hodge well puts it, "confirmation, as a solemn service, in which those recognised in their infancy as members of the Church on the faith of their parents, are confirmed in their Church standing on the profession of their own faith, is retained in form or in substance in all Protestant Churches.

In the Lutheran, and in most of the Reformed or Calvinistic Churches on the continent of Europe, children baptised in infancy, when they come to years of discretion, are publicly examined as to their knowledge of Christian doctrine, and

if free from scandal, are called upon to assume for themselves their baptismal vows, and are recognised as members of the Church in full communion.

In most Presbyterian Churches in Great Britain and Ireland, and especially in America, something more than competent knowledge and freedom from scandal being required, in order to admission to sealing ordinances, baptised youth are not, as a matter of course, admitted to the Lord's Supper on their arrival at the years of discretion. . . . The same examination as to knowledge, the same profession as to faith, the same engagements as to obedience, in short, the same assumption of the obligations of the baptismal covenant, and the same consequent access to the Lord's Table, which in other Churches constitute confirmation, in ours constitute what we are accustomed to call admission to sealing ordinances. The only difference is that we require more than knowledge and freedom from scandal as the condition of confirming baptised persons as members of the Church in full communion.

It is a great mistake, therefore, to represent confirmation as a prelatical service."¹

¹ Hodge, *The Church and its Polity*. Lond. 1879, p. 157. Comp. Matthes, *Comparative Symbolik aller Christl. Confessionen*, 592 f.

That this was the position taken on this subject by the most competent theologians of the Protestant Churches in Reformation times might easily be proved. It may be enough to give a few extracts from Calvin, who draws the true distinction in this matter with his wonted judgment and clearness of thought.

“It was an ancient custom that the children of Christians, after they had come to years of discretion, should be presented before the bishop, in order that they might fulfil that duty which was required of adults who offered themselves for Baptism. For such persons sat among the catechumens, until having been duly instructed in the mysteries of the Christian religion, they were able to make confession of their faith before the bishop and people.

“Those, therefore, who had been baptised as infants, because they had not then made confession of their faith before the Church, at the close of their boyhood or in early youth were presented again by their parents and examined by the bishop according to the form of the Catechism which was then in common use. And in order that this service, which was rightly held to be a solemn and sacred one, might have more of impressiveness and dignity about it, the action of imposition of hands was employed. . . . Such a laying on of hands, which should be simply in

place of a benediction, I approve of, and would wish to see restored and used in a pure manner in the present day. . . . As Augustine affirms, it is nothing else than a prayer for him on whom our hands are laid."¹

After showing the essential difference between such an action and the imposition of hands by the apostles in connection with the bestowal of miraculous gifts, and exposing the errors of the Popish doctrine of confirmation, Calvin concludes: "I wish sincerely that we should retain this custom, which, as I have said, was in use among the ancients before this abortive image of a sacrament was born into the world; not that there should be such a confirmation as the Romanists pretend, which cannot be so much as named without injury to baptism, but a catechetical service in which boys or youths should give an account of their faith before the Church.

Now it would be the best method of catechising if a formula were drawn up for this purpose, setting forth and explaining in a popular way a summary of the chief heads of our religion, in which the whole Church of the faithful should agree without controversy. A boy of ten years of age might present himself to make confession of his faith. He would be questioned on each of

¹ Comp. Bannerman, *Church of Christ*, ii. 431-4, on Imposition of Hands in Ordination.

the heads and give suitable answers. If he were ignorant of any of them, or did not fully understand, he would be further instructed. Thus the Church would be a witness to his profession of the one true and pure faith in which the whole company of the faithful worship the one God.

"If this discipline were observed in the present day it would assuredly give a spur to the slothfulness of some parents who carelessly neglect the instruction of their children, as if it were a thing with which they had no concern; but in that case they could not omit it without public disgrace. There would then be more harmony of faith among the Christian people; nor would so many show such ignorance and lack of instruction, and be so easily carried away by new and strange doctrines."¹

But all were not equally discriminating in this matter. In the Church of England, for example, confirmation was still made the exclusive prerogative of the bishop of the diocese, instead of being assigned, as Calvin would have assigned it, to the bishop in the New Testament sense of the word, the pastor under whom the catechumens had been trained, and to whom they naturally

¹ *Instit.* lib. iv. c. xix. 4, 12, 13. Comp. Comment on Heb. vi. 2. Calvin's statements on this subject were closely followed in the Catechism by Nowell, Dean of St. Paul's, which was approved by Convocation in 1562. Nowell's Catechism (Parker Society ed.) Cambridge, 1853, pp. 88 f. 211 f.

looked as their spiritual guide and father in the Lord. Apostolic authority was claimed for the laying on of the bishop's hands. In the order for confirmation, as in the baptismal service, the regeneration of the baptised was distinctly asserted. The qualifications for confirmation stated in the canons and rubrics, "if explained according to the letter," as an eminent Episcopalian writer on the subject frankly admits, "would seem only to imply an acquaintance with the catechism, and the benefit, whether influential or not, of instruction in its fundamental principles. This would include every species of the ungodly."¹

How, in spite of such errors and defects, and not a few abuses arising out of them, confirmation seasons in the Church of England have often been times of signal blessing, can be easily understood by any one who reads the chapter on confirmation in the work to which reference has now been made. It would be hard to find a better specimen of evangelical teaching, and of faithful and tender dealing with the hearts and consciences of young people in connection with their admission to Church privileges. Such earnest and loving pastoral care for the young could not but bear

¹ Bridges, Vicar of Old Newton, and author of the well-known "Exposition of Psalm cxix.," *The Christian Ministry*, 4th ed. 429.

fruit. It was eminently fitted to keep back the spiritually unprepared, to bring waverers to a right decision, and to make the time of a first public Christian profession a time of great blessing—

“When trembling at the sacred rail
We hid our eyes and held our breath,
Felt Thee how strong, our hearts how frail,
And longed to own Thee to the death.”¹

As regards the Protestant Churches on the Continent, confirmation in the Roman Catholic and prelatie sense was everywhere rejected, but in the sense and to the effect desired by Calvin, it was in not a few cases retained. In other cases, where for a considerable period no observance of the kind had existed, it was restored, as the need became felt for some definite recognition by the Church of those entering its membership in full communion for the first time.

This took place especially wherever evangelical life was strong, and where the old Reformation spirit of care for the young continued, or was revived in any marked degree. It was so, for example, in connection with the “Pietistic” movement in Germany in the 17th century. Spener, in particular, did much to concentrate attention on the significance and importance of the step taken by the catechumens when passing into the

¹ Keble, “Confirmation, in ‘Christian Year.’”

position of members in full standing. He viewed it especially as a renewal of the baptismal covenant, the obligations of which are voluntarily assumed by the applicant for admission to the Lord's Table. Through his influence confirmation services, embodying this idea, were introduced in Frankfort in 1666, whence they spread to many other places. They are now almost universal, in one form or other, both in the Lutheran and Reformed branches of the Protestant Church on the Continent.¹

Abuses could be named which have connected themselves with such services. It was inevitable that it should be so where formalism and sacramentarianism prevailed in the Church, and where, through the Erastian character of its relation to the State, confirmation was required as a necessary qualification before young people could enter upon any trade or profession.

But, as in the Church of England, wherever in Germany or Holland there was evangelical life in the pastorate, and the preparatory training and examination of the catechumens were conducted in the right spirit, there confirmation seasons have been known and remembered as times of great spiritual blessing. The place which the service

¹ Matthes, *Comp. Symb.* 592 f. Nitzsch, *Praktische Theologie*, ii. 147 ff., 2te Aufl. Oosterzee, *Practical Theology*. Lon. 1878, 430-4.

holds in the eyes of devout pastors and theologians of the German Church is well described by Nitzsch.¹ "Confirmation, as an observance, is religious, but not sacramental. It is a gross mistake to regard it as presenting a channel for the communication of the gift of the Holy Spirit. . . . With us it is held to form a suitable transition-step between Baptism and a first communion, both because the Baptism of the child was a pledge for its Christian and churchly education, and also because participation in the Lord's Supper presupposes a certain measure of Christian development, and consequently that that education has borne fruit and has so far reached its end.

Christ draws the baptised child into the realm of influences through which life and salvation are designed to flow to him. But these influences work through the Word of God and the fellowship of the Church. If the baptised child does not become a believer, through willing subjection of himself to the truth made known; then his Baptism remains for him, as Luther says, a dead

¹ Best known, perhaps, in this country from his masterly work "A Protestant Answer to Möhler's Symbolism" (*Protestantische Beantwortung der Symbolik Möhlers*). If confirmation has something of a Popish sound to some ears, no one will doubt the Protestantism of the author of the most conclusive reply to what is perhaps the ablest apology for Roman Catholicism written in our day.

treasure. It is therefore the duty of the Church to train up the baptised little one in the knowledge of salvation ; to bring him especially to a knowledge of himself in the Christian sense, for which end instruction is indispensable. Suppose that he never comes to the Lord's Table, but is to die before he is confirmed, he must, nevertheless, be so trained from his earliest years of understanding that he may live a Christian life and die a happy death. If, however, he is brought on as a catechumen to ripeness for communion, the Church has a right to be satisfied of his fitness in this respect. . . . An intelligent Christian profession, a voluntary joining of himself to the fellowship of faith, and waiting on the means of grace, these things must be established as facts within the cognisance of the Church ; on the orderly and solemn expression of them, thus established, the authority to enter the full communion of the Church is given.

The specific aim of all the instruction and training is that the young person be brought to a living, experimental knowledge of the Gospel, an aim which includes in itself that of a suitable confirmation of the baptismal covenant, or a right preparation for the communion, and which is in no way opposed to the other objects already spoken of as regards the instruction of the young, and laying the foundations of

Christian knowledge. To this end, of a living apprehension of the Gospel, everything is to be made subordinate, all school and disciplinary influences, all pastoral care and spiritual nurture of the catechumens. The whole teaching and training, with all the means of grace and the Church itself, have this for their true aim, that a child of man should become a child of God, and be saved through faith; that his Baptism should have its true and full meaning, and his calling and election be made sure."¹

In other parts of Reformed Christendom, again—as, for example, in Scotland—while the evils of sacramentarianism were avoided, something of a recoil to an opposite extreme took place. It was very natural that it should be so. Confirmation in the Roman Catholic and Prelatic sense was part of a system much and justly hated in Scotland. "Bishopping," as it was commonly called, had been one of the "Five Articles of Perth" pressed by James VI., under the influence of Laud, upon a reluctant nation. There was a natural dislike to the very name. It was not so easy, or as it seemed so safe, to say in such circumstances, as Calvin said of the confirmation practised in the early Church: "We should retain in our day this institution in a pure form,

¹ *Nitzsch, Prak. Theol.* ii. 166 f.

correcting the superstitions which have been attached to it."¹

Thus it came to pass in Scotland that while confirmation was strenuously and—in the form in which the Scottish Reformers had to deal with it—rightly rejected, nothing was put in its place. Sound views were held as to the Church standing of the children of believers. Much attention was given to catechising and the religious instruction of the young. There was a high standard of Church-membership. But in studying the history and development of Church life in this country, one cannot help feeling that in Scotland, in the days of the first and second Reformations, there was in general a certain loss of spiritual power and opportunity at the point of transition

¹ "Quamobrem hodie retinenda pura institutio est ; superstitio autem corrigenda."—*In Epist. ad Heb.*, cap. vi. 2. Calvin himself fully appreciated the motives and feelings of those who shrunk from such a proposal. "I am not at all surprised," he says in a letter to Farel, "that the kind of examination about which I wrote"—the reference is to something which might take the place of the Roman Catholic confession before mass—"gave rise to some scruples on the part of that good brother. It is nothing new for good souls to fear lest we should be slipping back into some superstition as often as they hear that we are proposing something which has any affinity or likeness whatsoever to any of the inventions of the Papists. But while, on the one hand, I do not desire that they should be less watchful against danger from that quarter—for we cannot be too careful in that respect—yet, on the other hand, I would wish them to take a little more pains to separate the wheat from the chaff and refuse."—*Opera* (Corpus Reformatorum), xi. p. 41.

between the ranks of the catechumens of the Church and her ordinary membership.

There was a want of something which would lead children of Christian parents to realise the special call which Christ had addressed to them in their Baptism—a call, perhaps, still unanswered,—and which would vividly set before them what the “Larger Catechism” calls “the needful, but much-neglected duty of improving our Baptism.”¹ And there was also lacking some practical and visible recognition by the Church, as such, of the step—so often a decisive one for good or evil in the spiritual history of the young—which takes an applicant for communion from the position of a baptised member of the Church into that of a member in full standing.

No guide was given to ministers and people with respect to this matter, as there was with respect to the celebration of marriage, the visitation of the sick, days of public fasting, &c., either in the Book of Common Order or the Westminster Directory for Public Worship. Yet, surely, the question was an important one: In what manner, on Scriptural principles, may the solemn admission and welcome of young disciples of Christ to the fellowship of His people be most suitably conducted? The answer might well

¹ Qu. 167. Comp. Candlish, *The Christian Sacraments*, 73-83—“Efficacy and Practical Use of Baptism.”

have engaged the best wisdom and warmest piety of the Church, and, coming with the authority of its highest Court, would have carried weight everywhere.

A few instances may be given of how, in the absence of any such assistance from the Church, individual ministers recognised the want of which I have spoken, and strove to answer the question as best they could for themselves.¹ I take one from each of three successive centuries of Scottish Church history.

Few ministers of the Church of Scotland in the sixteenth century did better service than John Davidson of Prestonpans. Like many others of that generation who had been trained in the school of Knox, he was not only a learned divine and a devoted Christian pastor, but a man of affairs. His natural force of character, ready wit, and shrewd judgment, gave him weight and influence with men of all classes. Whatever he

¹ A similar state of things existed in the Presbyterian Church in America. In an interesting and valuable work by a minister of that Church on Presbyterian Liturgies, the following statements occur: "A subject in which our present directory of worship leaves much to be desired is the 'admission of persons to sealing ordinances of the Church.' The want of any provision for that service has been generally remedied among us by the adoption of voluntary and extraneous forms, such as are in use among our Congregational brethren. This deficiency the Draught of 1787 admirably supplies. We quote it at some length," &c.—Baird, *Chapter on Liturgies*, London, 1856, 244.

took in hand, he threw into it a certain heartiness and goodwill to the work, which are peculiarly his own.

Thus, when in 1588 Bancroft "first broke the peace among the Reformed Churches" on the subject of Church government, by his sermon at Paul's Cross, John Davidson came forward to expose, as he said, "Dr. Bancroft's rashness in railing against the Church of Scotland," which he did in a way that rejoiced the heart of Andrew Melville.¹

But for nothing does Davidson more deserve to be remembered than for his labours for the intellectual and spiritual good of the young and ignorant in his own parish. At his own cost, he erected there a church and manse, provided a glebe and garden, built a schoolmaster's house and a grammar-school, and bequeathed books and money to equip it for the teaching of the three learned languages — Latin, Greek, and Hebrew.² Alike in church and school he spared no personal toil and pains for the Christian instruction of the young and the neglected.

In 1599, the Provincial Assembly or Synod of Lothian and Tweeddale considered and approved "A Form of Examination and Catechism, written

¹ Cunningham, *Works*, iii. 527 ff. ; M'Crie, *Life of Melville*, 2nd ed. vol. i. 305-310 ; ii. 159.

² M'Crie, *Melville*, ii. 414.

by our brother, Maister John Davidson." This little treatise, which was published by the authority of the Synod, sets before us an interesting picture of faithful pastoral work, in connection especially with preparation for the communion.¹ The title is: "Some Helps for Young Scholars in Christianity: the form of familiar instruction and examination of rude² people, entering to be disciples in the school of Christ; practised in the new-erected kirk of Salt-Prestoun and parish thereof, before the communion, not without experience of some profit and edification of God's people. Praised be God, blessed for ever, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen."

"After that the writer hath taken up the names in writ," Davidson tells us, "of sae monie as for the time are present of them that were warned to that diet, according to our visitation passing before, and hath demanded of every ane whether they can say the Ten Commands, the Belief, and the Lord's Prayer, and hath tried some maist suspected of ignorance in that case—though otherwise they affirm, as the manner is, they can say them—and exhortation given to learn with diligence where they want anything:

¹ It is easily accessible in Dr. Bonar's valuable little work, *Catechisms of the Scottish Reformation*. Lond. 1866, 324-57.

² That is, uninstructed. Davidson uses the word as Augustine does in the title of his tract, "De Catechizandis rudibus."

we proceed to prayer, after this or the like manner following :—

“ Bless us, gude Lord, and this familiar exercise that presently we are to have, by Thy grace, in catechising and instructing Thy people familiarly in the way of truth ; that thereby our own misery by nature and happy estate by grace in Christ being the better known to every ane of us, and this grace in Christ truly believed, we may learn to deny all confidence in ourselves and all other creatures, and putting our hail trust in our alone Saviour Jesus Christ, may study to earnest and unfeigned repentance and amendment of life all our days, through Jesus Christ our Lord. To whom, with the Father and the Holy Ghost, be praise and glory, now and ever. Amen.”

Thereafter, in four brief sections, to be taken up evidently on successive days, we have four short expositions of the main points of Christian faith and practice, in their bearing especially on the Lord’s Supper, with simple questions and exhortations arising out of the subject in hand.

In the rubrics, or directions for the service, there are not a few marks of the homely wisdom and kindly authority with which John Davidson took order among his “rude people,” the salters and fishermen of Prestonpans, “long sitting by the sea coast,” as he tells them, “in no less

darkness than did they of Galilee that dwelt by the Lake of Gennesareth, whilk was to them as a sea." The whole book breathes a warm, hopeful, evangelical spirit, which reminds one of Luther and the Heidelberg Catechism. It shows very vividly what a vigorous grasp Scottish ministers of the sixteenth century took of this part of their pastoral work, and how earnestly they were seeking, by practical essays and experiments of this kind, to shape out for themselves the best methods for the Christian instruction of the young and ignorant, and their preparation for full communion in the Church.¹

Passing on to the middle of the seventeenth century, look at the methods used then as regards admission to the communion in a landward parish in Fifeshire.

From the unsettled state of the country, arising out of Cromwell's invasion, the Lord's Supper had not been dispensed in Dalgetie for a considerable time. It was felt suitable that the first communion season after peace had been

¹ One of the mottos which Davidson put on his title-page expresses this aspect of his work with a touch of characteristic humour: "Multa cavillari promptius est quam æmulari.

It is mair easy faults to pike

In monie things than do the like."

"If anything be wrang here," he adds at the end of his Catechism, "it is of weakness and not of wilfulness, and therefore is humbly submitted to the loving and advised correction of the godly learned by God's Word."

restored should be kept with special solemnity. The minister and elders, therefore, began by appointing a week of prayer for guidance and blessing in the matter. Thereafter the session passed an "Act" to the following effect :—

"The session, taking into consideration the trial and examination of people in order to the communion, do think fit—(1.) That people of all ranks within the congregation be examined ; and that none be admitted to come to that ordinance that refuse to submit themselves to trial. (2.) That some of the most judicious of the elders be appointed from time to time, to be concurring with the minister in this work, that such as shall in any measure be found qualified may be admitted, and others laid by for the present till further pains be taken upon them. (3.) That people be tried—1st, In their knowledge of the grounds of religion, whether they be such as in some measure are able to "discern the Lord's body ;" 2nd, in the point of prayer, whether they be aiming in any measure at the seeking of God, and if they be heads of families, whether they have prayer and God's worship in their families, yea, what care they have to bring up their children in the knowledge of the Lord, according to their solemn engagement at baptism, and how they carry themselves towards their servants in things that relate to godliness. . . . (5.) How they walk in their stations, whether they follow the duties of their calling, whether they live without scandal and offence, especially if they be free of drunkenness, of swearing, and profaning the name of God, and if in some measure their conversation and walking be suitable to the Gospel ; yea, if their endeavour and desire tend that way.

"And the session, however they resolve to use tenderness toward such as now come to years, and have been bred in ignorance, if so be they be in any measure concerned,

have any good affection to the way of God, are labouring for more knowledge and live soberly, yet they think that such as are young and have had the means of a better education ought to be exactly tried, and not admitted to the communion till they be in some measure qualified, lest by the sudden and rash admitting of them they be hardened in sin and ignorance.”¹

Thereafter for several months the parish was carefully visited, district by district, and people of all ranks examined by minister and elders. Several of the latter were men of the highest social standing in the county, so that there was no difficulty in finding examiners likely to deal in a suitable way with persons in different positions in society, as the session probably had in view in one of their resolutions.

More than a fortnight before the communion Sabbath, a number of young persons are reported upon in the session as having been carefully dealt with in their own districts by minister and elders, and as now “in some measure qualified.” A week later, these young people appear together before the session. They are “seriously exhorted,” as the session record bears, “to study the Scriptures and the knowledge of God, and to walk in some suitableness to the Gospel, and so receive their tokens.”²

¹ Ross, *Pastoral Work in Covenanting Times*. Lond. 1877. 122 f.

² Ross, 133.

No better instance of a faithful and fruitful ministry in the eighteenth century could be given than that of Willison of Dundee. His name is an honoured one still among the best of our Scottish people. Some of his works in the department of practical theology are of lasting value. Others of a more popular kind, such as the "Mother's Catechism" and "The Afflicted Man's Companion," are household words over all Scotland.

Throughout his ministry of nearly fifty years, Willison devoted himself with special earnestness and success to the care of the young among his flock. It is interesting to observe how often and how strongly he insists upon the importance of a wise and carefully-considered method of admission to a first communion. I can give but a few extracts in illustration.

In the preface to his Sacramental Catechism, after referring to the Act of Assembly, 1706, 11, regarding instruction and exhortation before admission to the Lord's Supper, Willison proceeds: "Accordingly, I have known some ministers at very much pains with young persons before their first communicating, instructing them as above directed, telling them that they were now to enter into the state of adult Church-membership, to be taken into Christ's family, and share in the children's privileges sealed to them

in baptism ; that, therefore, they must now make a choice for themselves, ratify their parents' deed, and become Christians by their own voluntary consent, as well as by their parents' dedication, and renew their baptismal covenant with judgment and understanding. And after much pains taken upon them in private, they have called their young communicants together in a public manner, catechising them, and opening up to them the nature of the Gospel covenant and their baptismal engagement ; and with some solemnity asking each of them their consent thereunto, and taking them engaged personally to renew covenant with God in secret, and make choice of God for their God, and Christ for their Saviour and Husband, before they should approach to His Table ; and upon these terms giving them their tokens.

“Unto all which they joined suitable directions and encouragements, concluding all by giving up and recommending these young communicants to God in solemn and fervent prayer. Which method I have known accompanied with great tenderness and many tears among the young people ; one of them helping to affect another—yea, and make very moving impressions upon the whole audience ; and I doubt not but such occasions have been to some the time of their espousals to the Lord Jesus Christ, which

they are to remember with thankfulness and praise.”¹

In his “Young Communicant’s Catechism,” Willison has a section entitled, “A proposal for young communicants: their express renewing the baptismal engagements before their first admission to the Lord’s Table; which practice might be much for edification, especially if duly managed and done with some solemnity before witnesses, such as ministers, elders, and other young persons.” The questions which follow are good but cumbrous.

A passage to the same effect occurs in his “Directions to Ministers of the Gospel,” in a remarkable sermon preached by him before the Synod of Angus and Mearns in 1733, with special reference to the first Secession.²

In the three great sections into which the Presbyterianism of Scotland is at present unhappily divided, more attention has been given of late years to the matter which Willison and other worthies of the Scottish Church in former centuries had so much at heart.

In the Free Church of Scotland, the General Assembly of 1871 had before it a careful report by the Home Mission Committee regarding the duty of the Church to different classes of her

¹ Willison, *Practical Works*, 442.

² *Practical Works*, 589-92, 835-37.

members. Special reference was made in this report to those who have been recognised as members in their infancy by Baptism. "They should in early life be made aware of the obligations laid on them by their Baptism. The eye of the Church should ever follow those who, when infants, were baptised into her communion. Ministers and elders should see to it that they grow up in the knowledge of the truth as it is in Jesus, and that they early give themselves to the Lord.

"The Committee recommend the adoption of the system of congregational catechising of the young, as well as family catechising, and also that a general roll of all members, young and old, be kept by the kirk-session. The children should be the care, not of their own parents only, but of the congregation, whose prayers and efforts should be directed to preserve them from falling, to promote their growth and steadfastness, until, by a personal acceptance of Christ, and a public profession of faith in Him, they become members of the Church in full communion."

The committee also recommended that a copy of a card drawn up by them, containing a few counsels to young communicants, should be given to each person admitted for the first time to the Lord's Table.

The Assembly unanimously approved of these

proposals of the committee, and recommended all sessions to act upon them.¹ This, to a considerable extent, has been done. The methods commonly used in the Free Church of Scotland are in substance as follows :—

Applicants for admission to the Lord's Table for the first time attend the minister's preparatory classes for some weeks previous to the communion. They are dealt with individually in private by the minister and the elder of the district to which they belong. If, after due instruction and consideration, they see their own way to make the profession implied in coming to the Lord's Table, and if the pastor and elder see no reason for keeping them back or advising delay, their names are reported to the session for approval. On this being obtained, the "young communicants," as they are commonly called in Scotland, are admitted together in presence of the minister and elders.

This is generally done either at the close of one of the preparatory services before the communion, or at a short special service, to which the congregation are invited, for the purpose of receiving and welcoming those added to their fellowship at this time. Such services are often

¹ *Blue Book*, 1871, p. 249. Comp. Report on "Welfare of the Youth of the Church," submitted to Assembly of 1874 in *Blue Book* of that year, p. 253. Append. xxvii. B.

largely attended, and have proved to be times of much solemnity and spiritual impression. The names of the young communicants are read over publicly, and they receive their tokens or communion cards from the minister, who gives them the right hand of fellowship in name of the session, and is followed in this by the elders present. In some cases a suitable text of Scripture is given to each of those thus admitted. In others, the card above referred to is given, along with a few words of encouragement and counsel. It is to the following effect :—

“You are a member of the Free Church of Scotland. See that you are a member of Christ’s body, the Church.

As professing Christ, you are bound to live in and for Him, to walk in His steps, and to adorn His doctrine in all things. For the increase of that spiritual life which leads to life eternal, you must diligently attend to the following among other means of grace :—

I. Secret prayer and the private reading of the Scriptures.

II. The sanctification of the Sabbath and the services of God’s house.

III. The sacrament of the Lord’s Supper, with the private exercises and public services that should accompany its observance.

It is also your duty—

(1.) To study well the history and principles of the Free Church.

(2.) To contribute as you are able to the support of her ministry, of her missions to the Jews and to the heathen, and her other Christian enterprises.

The true member of the Church must be a prayerful, intelligent, and cheerful giver.

Should you have to leave your district and join another congregation, remember to see your minister before you leave, and get from him your certificate of Church membership, and to give that certificate as soon as possible to the minister of the congregation which you join.

“So we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another.” “Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.” “Stand fast, therefore, in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with any yoke of bondage.” “As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith.”

In the United Presbyterian Church of Scotland the following questions have been authorised by the Synod to be put to applicants for admission :—

1. “Do you acknowledge the Scriptures of the

Old and New Testaments to be the Word of God, and the only infallible rule of faith and practice ?

2. Do you believe in God,—in the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, one God ?

3. Do you acknowledge yourselves to be by nature guilty, depraved, and helpless ? And do you believe that salvation is only from the grace of God, through the obedience unto death of His Son, and the sanctifying influence of the Holy Ghost ?

4. Do you believe in Jesus Christ as your Saviour, own Him as your Lord, and engage, in dependence on the promised aids of His Spirit, to observe His ordinances and obey His laws ?

5. Do you, as far as your knowledge extends, approve, as agreeable to the Word of God, of the views of Divine truth and duty held by this Church, and of the principles on which its constitution and order are founded ?

6. Do you promise to submit to the session of this congregation, as over you in the Lord ; to contribute according to your ability for the support and extension of the Gospel, and to study to promote the welfare of the congregation ; and by a holy life to adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour ? ”¹

These questions are very commonly put by the pastor, in presence of the session and congre-

¹ *Summary of Principles of United Presbyterian Church* (approved by Synod), p. 16.

gation, to the young communicants. They signify their assent, and are admitted accordingly.

As regards the Established Church of Scotland, I am not aware that any special action has been taken in this matter by the Assembly or the Church, as such. "The Church Service Society," however, which embraces a large number of the ministers of the Establishment, has published a volume of forms of worship under the title of "Euchologion," which has passed through several editions, and is widely used.

In this work there is an "Order for the Admission of Catechumens to the Confirmation of the Baptismal vow, and to the participation of the Lord's Supper." It has some excellent features, but is open to objection, from a slight tendency to sacramentarianism, in expression, at least, in several of its statements.¹

Forms of service of this kind, intended for the admission of catechumens to full communion, have been frequently drawn up, with varying success, by eminent men in the Presbyterian Church, from Richard Baxter, in his "Reformed Liturgy," to Dr. A. A. Hodge, in his "Manual of Forms for Baptism, Admission to the Communion, &c., conformed to the doctrine and discipline of the Presbyterian Church."² I conclude by

¹ *Euchologion: A Book of Common Order.* 3rd ed., 158-63.

² Philadelphia, 1877. 14-30.

giving two instances of such forms, used by Churches.

The Dutch Reformed Church in America is known over all the world as one of the most orthodox of the fifty-two Churches on the roll of the Presbyterian Alliance. It has always been honourably distinguished alike for soundness in the faith, for interest in higher theological education, and for zeal in the cause of missions. Its missionaries laboured among the Indians of North America in the seventeenth century, even before Eliot. In our days, the Dutch Reformed Church was the first to preach the Gospel in Japan, and has done so with remarkable success. It would be hard to find anywhere literary and theological institutions more fully equipped and better manned than those of New Brunswick and Hope College.

Like most of the Continental Protestant Churches, and like the German Reformed Church in America, the Dutch Reformed Church has always used an optional liturgy in conjunction with free prayer in the public worship of God.¹ This liturgy contains the following "order for

¹ The General Synod, in approving a revision of the liturgy in 1878, added this note: "This revised liturgy is set forth as a general expression of the way in which the public services of religion should be performed. It is to be understood that it is not of binding authority, but is only recommended as containing suitable offices for public religious service."

the public reception into full communion of those who have been baptised in infancy":—

"The candidates shall stand before the minister. While they are coming forward, an appropriate hymn may be sung. Then the minister will say :

Dearly beloved in Christ, as children of your heavenly Father, you stand here for the deliberate and public ratification in your own persons of that covenant of God of which your Baptism is the seal. You have already been duly instructed, and have made confession before us of your faith in the blessed Saviour. And now in this most solemn manner, before God and His Church, you are to repeat and renew that confession.

I ask each one of you, then :

Dost thou believe in God the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth ?

Answ. I do.

Dost thou believe in Jesus Christ His only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and buried ; He descended into hell ; the third day He rose again from the dead ; He ascended into heaven, and sitteth at the right hand of God the Father Almighty ; from thence He shall come to judge the quick and the dead ?

Answ. I do.

Dost thou believe in the Holy Ghost, the holy Catholic Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting?

Answ. I do.

Dost thou purpose steadfastly to continue to the end of thy life in the truth affirmed in these articles of the Christian faith, as they are taught here in this Church, according to the Word of God, rejecting all heresies and schisms repugnant thereto?

Answ. I do.

Dost thou promise to persevere in the communion of the Christian Church, and in the diligent use of all the means of grace, especially in the hearing of the Word and the use of the Lord's Supper, to seek the things that make for purity and peace, and to submit thyself to all Christian care and admonition?

Answ. I do.

Then the minister will say :

Since, then, thou hast witnessed this good confession ; in the name of the Church and of Jesus Christ her Lord and Head, I do now welcome thee to full communion with the people of God.

(The following, or some other appropriate blessing, will then be used, given to each one separately or to all together, as the minister may choose):

The mountains shall depart and the hills be

removed ; but my kindness shall not depart from thee, neither shall the covenant of my peace be removed, saith the Lord that hath mercy on thee.

The Lord bless thee and keep thee. The Lord make His face to shine upon thee and be gracious unto thee. The Lord lift up His countenance upon thee and give thee peace. Amen.

The minister will then offer the following thanksgiving :—

Almighty and everlasting God, we thank and praise Thee that Thou hast vouchsafed unto these Thy servants power and grace to own and accept for themselves Thy holy covenant, sealed and confirmed unto them in their Baptism. Strengthen them, we beseech Thee, with the Holy Ghost the Comforter. Increase in them daily Thy manifold gifts of grace : the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord. Keep them from the evil that is in the world. Defend them from the power of the devil. Enable them to walk in the Spirit, that they may not fulfil the lusts of the flesh ; and so lead them in the knowledge and obedience of Thy Word, that they may obtain everlasting life, through Jesus Christ our Lord, who with Thee and the Holy Ghost, liveth and reigneth, ever one God, world without end. Amen.”¹

¹ *The Liturgy of the Reformed Church in America.* New York, 1873, 32-34.

The other instance which I give is from the liturgy of the Reformed Episcopal Church in America. Its office for confirmation is a good specimen of the judicious and generally successful way in which this Church has revised the Anglican prayer-book in the interests of Protestant and evangelical doctrine.

“When the persons about to confirm their baptismal covenant have taken their appointed places before the bishop, the following preface shall be read :—

Beloved, it is written that when the apostles at Jerusalem had heard that Samaria had received the Word of God, they sent unto them Peter and John, who, when they were come and had prayed for them, laid their hands on those who were baptised in the name of the Lord Jesus. Also in the same Scripture we read that St. Paul laid his hands upon certain disciples at Ephesus after their Baptism. In accordance therefore with apostolic custom and the practice of the early Church, we have retained this rite of laying on of hands upon those who are baptised, in order that they may thus give further testimony to their faith in Christ, and to their unchanged purpose to lead a new life, following the commandments of God, and walking in His holy ways.

Then shall the Bishop say :

Do ye here, in the presence of God and of this

congregation, solemnly profess repentance towards God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ ?

And every one shall audibly answer :

I do.

Bishop. Do you believe all the articles of the Christian faith as contained in the Apostles' Creed ?

Answ. I do.

Bishop. Do you steadfastly purpose by God's help to renounce the devil, the world, and the flesh, and to keep God's holy will and commandments, and to walk in the same all the days of your life ?

Answ. I do.

Bishop. Our help is in the name of the Lord :

Answ. Who hath made heaven and earth.

Bishop. Blessed be the name of the Lord.

Answ. Henceforth, world without end.

Bishop. Lord, hear our prayer.

Answ. And let our cry come unto Thee.

Bishop. Let us pray.

Almighty and everlasting God, who in Thine infinite mercies hast called us to the knowledge of Thy truth and faith in Thy Son Jesus Christ ; graciously look upon these Thy servants, accept their confessions, and favourably receive this renewed offering of themselves which they now make unto Thee. Strengthen them, we beseech Thee, O Lord, with the Holy Ghost the Comforter,

and daily increase in them Thy manifold gifts of grace, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and ghostly strength, the spirit of knowledge and true godliness, and fill them, O Lord, with the spirit of Thy holy fear, now and for ever. Amen.

Then all kneeling before the bishop, he shall lay his hands upon the head of every one severally, saying :

Defend, O Lord, this Thy child (or, this Thy servant) with Thy heavenly grace : that he may continue Thine for ever, and daily increase in Thy Holy Spirit more and more, until he come unto Thine everlasting kingdom. Amen.

Bishop. The Lord be with you.

Answ. And with Thy spirit.

Bishop. Let us pray.

Almighty and everliving God, who makest us both to will and to do those things which are good and acceptable unto Thy Divine Majesty : we make our humble supplications unto Thee for these Thy servants, who have now thus publicly ratified and confirmed the solemn obligations of their baptismal covenant, and have dedicated themselves anew to Thee and Thy service. Let Thy Fatherly hand, we beseech Thee, ever be over them ; let Thy Holy Spirit ever be with them ; and so lead them in the knowledge and obedience of Thy Word, that they now and ever-

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more, rejoicing in Thy salvation, may lay hold on eternal life, through our Lord Jesus Christ ; who, with Thee and the Holy Ghost, liveth and reigneth ever, one God, world without end. Amen.

O almighty Lord and everlasting God ! vouchsafe, we beseech Thee, to direct, sanctify, and govern both our hearts and bodies in the ways of Thy laws, and in the works of Thy commandments, that, through Thy most mighty protection, both here and ever, we may be preserved in body and soul ; through our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

Almighty God ! who showest to them that are in error the light of Thy truth, to the intent that they may return into the way of righteousness : grant unto all those who are admitted into the fellowship of Christ's religion that they may avoid those things which are contrary to their profession, and follow all such things as are agreeable to the same ; through our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Then the bishop shall bless them, saying : The blessing of God Almighty, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, be upon you, and remain with you for ever. Amen.

Members of other Churches uniting with this Church need not be confirmed except at their own request.

Note.—The administration of the order of confirmation is confined to the bishops, not as of Divine right, but as a very ancient and desirable form of Church usage.”¹

¹ *Book of Common Prayer of the Reformed Episcopal Church.* Philadelphia, 1874. In the “Declaration of Principles” prefixed to this Prayer-book the following statement is made:—“This Church, retaining a liturgy which shall not be imperative or repressive of freedom in prayer, accepts the ‘Book of Common Prayer,’ as it was revised, proposed, and recommended for use by the General Convention of the Protestant Episcopal Church, 1785, reserving full liberty to alter, abridge, enlarge, and amend the same, as may seem most conducive to the edification of the people, ‘provided that the substance of the faith be kept entire.’”



